8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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4. TRADE AND LOANS

Trade has never been extensive among the Nuer. There is, of course, a division of labour according to sex, but there are few people who can be accounted specialist craftsmen. Individuals acquire the reputation for making certain specific objects with exceptional skill, but they rarely if ever belong to a family especially associated with such activities. This is an exceptional contrast to specialization in the spiritual sphere, for there are hereditary experts capable of dealing with almost any unusual phenomena: ritual experts, magicians, sooth-sayers and medicine-owners, who demand fees, often in cattle, for their services.

The reason lies, perhaps, in the extraordinary simplicity of Nuer material culture. Most things necessary for their migratory way of life (and this applies to all peoples who move with the seasons) can be made either from wood or grass or from the products of their cattle. Seasonal migration in any case precludes a high degree of virtuosity, for things are liable to breakage and are often an unnecessary encumbrance. Moreover the Nuer, who do not use their animals for transport, must carry everything by hand.

Certain objects were of relatively high value, and were exchanged for cattle or sheep and goats. Nowadays, however, most of these articles—hoes, spears, ornaments and the like—can be obtained for cash, and disputes do not often arise in the courts except over the sale of grain.

Trade in Cattle

Trade in cattle is clearly increasing as a cash economy becomes more important to the Nuer but, as yet, cattle are rarely sold except when the purchase of grain is necessary. A significant paragraph from the Jonglei Investigation Team's *Third Interim Report* (1948) is worth quoting, for the figures given, although taken from all Nilotic inhabitants of the Upper Nile Province, include all the Nuer:

> The disposal of surplus livestock is governed by private, family, and tribal circumstances, and is at present tied up with the need to find cash; this is required mainly for the purchase of grain and veterinary vaccines and, to a small extent, for the payment of taxes. There are four channels through which the inhabitants can dispose of their animals:
>
> (*a*) By sale to the Veterinary Laboratory at Malakal, where they will be used to produce cattle-plague vaccine and serum.
>
> (*b*) By sale to Malakal butchers for local consumption.
>
> (*c*) By export to Equatoria Province, in which case most of them will be butchered in Juba.
>
> (*d*) By export northwards to the markets of Kosti and Omdurman.
>
> In the majority of cases all trade is carried out through merchants as intermediaries. . . . Previously it had often been necessary for the District Commissioner concerned to exercise pressure before the local inhabitants could be induced to sell.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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291 chiefs. If he does wear a cloth, he wears it under one arm and knotted over the opposite shoulder. The Nuer appropriates any old cast-off clothing he may find. Sometimes grotesque effects are produced when he appears attired in his new wardrobe.

576 A man must never appear before his mother-in-law unless he is wearing some kind of a loin-cloth. It may be of skin (Fig. 1) or cloth, but he must have at least a one-piece suit on besides his beads.

291 A woman after marriage must always wear a loin-cloth of some description. And as she grows older, she usually wears a cloth or sheepskin over the upper part of her body, under one arm and fastened over the opposite shoulder.

The married woman's garb (Figs. 2 and 3) consists of a triangular piece of sheepskin worn over the pubic region, with a larger triangular piece of sheepskin at the back, the two pieces meeting at the waistline at each side but not overlapping to any extent. The lower point of each is longer and narrower than the upper points, terminating in a narrow strip about one or two inches wide. The piece that is worn in front usually has a border of beads sewed on it and may have a small bell hung on the end.

Sometimes a number of little thin strips of sheepskin about eight to ten inches long are fastened together and then worn in front in place of the triangular piece of sheepskin that is usually worn there.

The back part of this garb has a border of beads (from one and one-half to two inches wide) at the waist but not on the sides, unless the woman is quite old, and then she may if she wishes have a border of beads on the sides also.

[301] Bells, charms, shells, pendants of any kind, short pieces of cowtails, may be fastened at the waistline on the back part of the married woman's dress.

482 A Nuer girl, when quite young, begins to carry burdens such as water-jars on her head.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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occupies a place in the enclosure. Cane-stalks are generally 354
used for fuel, although the women may go to the forest
and bring wood.

The skin of a reed-buck is not usually seen in the Nuer 753
home. A Nuer woman whose first child is a girl will not
sit on the skin of the reed-buck as she believes sores will
break out on her body if she does so. So the skin of the
reed-buck is not as popular as it might be if there were no
superstition attached to it. I gave a woman guest the
skin of a reed-buck to sit on one day—thinking that I was
honouring her, for it certainly was pretty—and was
amazed at the way she suddenly sprang to her feet and
got off the skin, explaining her actions by saying that her
first child was a girl.

A visitor—if a stranger in Nuerland—is appalled by 181
the paucity of the possessions in a Nuer family. What they
have seems, even at its best, such a meagre portion of the
things we think necessary for this life. Yet the wants of
the Nuer are few. He wants food, a place to sleep in,
cattle, at least one wife and as many more as he can
possibly afford, and children. He wants also a good spear
and club. These desires of his heart he wants to have
supplied with the least possible effort on his own part.

THE WOMAN'S DAY

The day begins early for the mother. Soon after day- 512
break she must take her large earthen jar and go to the 482
river for water. She has a head-pad made of cane-leaves,
with a hole in the middle of it—indeed, it resembles a
huge doughnut. She puts this head-pad on her head and
then puts the large earthen jar on top of it. She carries
herself erect, occasionally putting one hand up to steady
the jar. But usually she lets one hand hang down while in
the other she carries her long-stemmed pipe, smoking as [276]
she goes.

512 she goes. She steadies her jar with her hand as she goes
•482 down the river bank.

She rinses her jar with water, then fills it. She usually stops to wash her face and is then ready to return to her village. She calls one of the other women who are getting water, or if there are none there to help she calls some passer-by, who—even if it be a man—will usually stop to help her to lift the jar up and put it on her head. On the homeward trip she steadies the jar with one hand, as being full of water it is much heavier.

512 When she returns to her home the morning meal must
252 be ready by nine or ten o'clock. So she pounds the dura in the hole already described, and sifts it until she has enough for the morning meal. Or perhaps she has a large stone, in which case she takes a small piece of smoothed wood resembling our rolling-pin and grinds the dura on the stone with it.

Then the fire is built with cane-stalks for fuel, and the earthen cooking-pot, partly filled with water, is put over the fire. It is supported by three little mounds of hard baked earth, and she keeps shoving the stalks of cane into the fire as fast as they burn away. The pounded dura is put into the water gradually, a little at a time, and stirred frequently with a cane-stalk having two small cross-pieces fastened at right angles at the end of it, made for that purpose. When the food is ready, the woman dishes up the men's portion in a large half-gourd which serves as a dish, puts the mussel-shell spoons in it, and calls the men to their breakfast. They go into the house and eat.

512 Then the women, if they are young or newly married,
264 eat where they will not be seen by the men. If they have been married several years they may eat together.

512 The yard has to be swept, the children fed and cared for, more dura must be pounded for the evening meal.

1 [Cf. pp. 19-20, Category 116.--Analyst]